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AUTHOR Huang, Carol
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ABSTRACT

Currently, culturally sensitive teaching of Asian Americans is basically confined for the most part to the college level. Asian American studies programs have become the site for Asian Americans to relearn, redefine, even regain their identity. This paper seeks to apply the knowledge and scholarship developed in Asian American studies in the past 20 years, which includes history, community, and literature, to an early elementary level reading class in an attempt to nurture an Asian/Pacific American point of view at an early age. Through analysis of themes such as migration and family history in Asian/Pacific American children's literature, the paper offers a critique of the underlying ideology and school practices from an Asian American's point of view. It also addresses strategies for countering the mainstream media's impact on Asian American children. The paper considers the construction of Asian American identities in three major categories: (1) mass media representations; (2) Pan-Asian identity; and (3) the model minority. It addresses Asian Americans' immigration history after 1965 at the time of the formation of American "white" suburbs and the most recent emerging "ethnoburbs." (Contains 4 notes and a 44-item bibliography.) (BT)

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Construction of Asian American Cultural Space in Elementary Reading.

by Carol Huang

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Construction of Asian American Cultural Space in Elementary Reading

Carol Huang, Ed Policy Studies, University of Illinois at U-C

Currently, culturally sensitive teaching of Asian Americans is basically confined for the most part to the college level (Okihiro1995, Lowe 1996, Hirabayashi 1998). Asian American studies programs have become the site for Asian Americans to relearn, redefine, even regain their identity. This paper is interested in applying the knowledge and scholarship developed in Asian American Studies in the past 20 years, which includes history, community, and literature, to an early elementary level reading class in an attempt to nurture an Asian/Pacific American point of view at an early age. Through analysis of themes such as migration and family history in Asian/Pacific American children's literature, this paper will offer a critique of the underlying ideology and school practices from an Asian American's point of view. Strategies for countering the mainstream media's impact on Asian American children will be addressed.

Cultural intersections found in the mainstream material offer educational opportunities to bring in culturally specific incidents in history in attempting to bridge the gap between school and home cultures. This project will counter the invisibility of Asian/Pacific American cultures in the society by helping children to develop a positive self-image and learn tactics to deal with real life situations when encountering discrimination and racism.

Locating the Site for Negotiation: Current Status of the Communities

The current population of Asian Americans is about 3 million The numbers represent an increase of 145 percent from 1980 to 1990. In 1965, only 16,000 Asians were allowed to immigrate to the United States, while in 1989 more than 250, 000 entered.

I will address the construction of Asian American identities in three major categories: mass media representations, Pan-Asian identity, and the model minority. Second, I will address Asian Americans' immigration history after 1965 at the time of the formation of American white suburbs and the most recent emerging ethnoburbs.

The most damaging sterotypes of Asian/ Pacific Americans is that they are assumed as eternal foreigners. Take the most recent incident for an example: on March 3, 1998, NBC had this headline after Tara Lapinski won the gold medal in figure skating: "American beats Kwan." Contrary to the implication, Michelle Kwan is American. The slip was yet another instance, telling anyone who is paying attention that being Asian American means that the uncontrollable fluidity of identity between model minority and eternal foreigner depends on the mercy of mainstream interpretation. This headline demonstrated Asian Americans' social position in the mainstream society. In times of interracial conflict or even in competiive sports, they are easily seen as marginal and undeserving aliens.

Historically, discriminatory immigration policy contributes to the tendency to view all Asian immigrants as foreigners[1]. This general perception often leads Asian Americans view themselves as undeserving aliens in this country. For instance, historian Judy Yung thought her parents were first generation immgrants and that she is second generation, born and raised in San Francisco, until she researched her family history and found out that she was really the third generation on her father's side and the fourth generation on her mother's side. (Yung, 1995: 1) If even some old timers (Asian Americans whose families have been in the United States for serveral generations) like Judy Yung have this perception about their own family history,

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[1]Such as the Page Act of 1875 which put a severe restriction on Chinese women's immigration, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which excluded all Chinese laborers and the 1922 Cable Act which took away the citizenship of American born Chinese women if they married Chinese men who were considered ineligible for citizenship.

young children with not much historical knowledge definitely will feel that they are undeserving aliens and no matter how many generations their ancesters migrated to this country. They still categorize themselves as foreigners because their were the target of various ethnically and racially discriminatory immigration policies that made Asian Americans eternal foreigners by depriving them of the possibility of becoming natualized for almost one century.

Another problem stems from the political reality of the general acceptance of Pan-Asian identity in the school curriculum and the general categorization of students' ethnic identity. This view usually lumps all Asians together. This representation silences the multiple voices and serves as an eraser of ethnicity, culture, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, generation, achievement, and other differences. The greatest impact on the construction of Asian/Pacific American identities is the assigned role of Asian Americans as the model minority. Many consider model minority status as a hegemonic power and a double-edged sword. It pits Asian Americans against African Americans. And when they compete, they are consenting to the designation. Frank Chin who named this trap "racist love" (1974) concludes: "If the system works, the stereotypes assigned to the various races are accepted by the races themselves as reality, as fact, and racist love reigns." (p. 65) Active resistance to the condition of the stereotypes is very difficult for young children. Model minority status gives rise to Asian Americans blindly speaking proudly about their assigned stereotypes and doing what their parents want them to do. It compels all Asian American to work hard, get good grades, and stay out of trouble (Ogbu 1987,1991). It also gives rise to their political meekness (Manshio, 1995). These four sterotypes contribute to the formation of an Asian American identity. Lena Choe in a paper presented in the Asian American Studies in 1999 points out the identity-shaping processes of Asian American youth in Chicago suburbs and concludes that Asian American minorities not only have a double

consciousness like that described by W. E. B. DuBois in Souls of the Black Folk (1903), but are also shaped by the Pan-Asian identity, which contributes to their triple/multiple consciousness.

Many researchers (for instance: Pang & Cheng, 1998) suggest that increasing the sensitivity of teachers to basic concepts of Asian American identity will prepare them to help Asian American children cope with the problems they face. They provide strategies like seeing the diverse groups with general patterns: Large intra group differences like national origins, language and cultural differences like Vietnamese Chinese and Vietnamese, and individual variations like children's immediate learning enviorment, family structure, economic status, etc., and their impact in the classroom.

Demographical Shifts and Changes in Asian American Communities

The category "Asian American" is purely an American invention. Chunking immigrants from Asia, which has about 60% of the world population, into one ethnic group is problematic. Since the creation of this census category in the 1960s, Asian Americans had started to form their political platform based on this assumed identity. Asian American Studies has taken the mission of finding its political bases and pouring a great amount of its energy into chasing after the community, trying to understand its development, formation and even reincarnation through the years. Starting in the 1980s, Roger Daniels (1988) and Peter Kwong (1987) have noticed that there are two separate Asian American communities divided by social class and geographical location of residence. Peter Kwong simply calls them uptowners and downtowners: those who lived outside traditional Chinatown and have professional jobs, and those who live in the traditional Chinatowns and have service-oriented jobs. The differences in the Asian/Pacific American communities can be seen in the educational attainment and achievement of Asian American students. For instance, in San Diego in 1995, Asian/Pacific Americans (APA) represented 3 percent of the

total population but 30 percent of its highest academic achievers; however APA students also had a high drop-out rate of 27 percent (San Francisco Unified School District, 1995). Demography of the communities changed drastically in the 1980s and 1990s; already by 1992 Chen, in trying to find a Taiwanese community in Flushing, New York, declared No More Chinatown because he could not find a town that could be called Chinatown. In 1999 Wei Li came up with the idea of the multiethnic ethnoburb when she did her field work in Los Angeles' San Gabriel Valley area. Sanja Rogers thought this type of neighborhood is The Future of Us All (1999) in his study on Sunny Side area of Queens in New York City where various ethnic groups live harmonious together.

Regardless of the multiethnic modern day ethnoburb, Asian/ pacific Americans who reside in these kind of ethnoburbs are an easy target becasue their visibility. David Palumbo-Liu (1994, cited by Stacy Lee 1996) interpreted the Korean ethnoburb as an Asian immigrant site even through their population might represent less than 10 percent of the total population. He further indicates that during the LA riot of 1992 that the Korean ethnoburb, an ethnically mixed neighborhood, served as a buffer zone between white suburbia and the inner city (Lee, 1996, 371). Ann P. Kalayll (1995) calls this kind of buffer zone which is located in the north side of Chicago near Devon Avenue a "Multicultural Corridor". Again, Asian American residential areas are marked and overtly visible. When there is a racial riot, their businesses have been the first to be attacked also because of their visibility and their assumed undeserving position in the mixed neighborhood. In the 1990s, demographers no longer find monoethnic towns but multiethnic ethnoburbs. The research on them is gradually shifting its focus to more interethnic relations (Kim 1995, Choi 1995).

Categorizations of Asian American Population :
Attempts by Asian American Studies

For a clearer picture of the communities and its educational implications, Kenyen Chan (1995) suggests that the population of Asian Americans can be divided into four major categories : transnational, old timers, FOBs (Fresh-off-Boat) and refugees. But the categories create another set of problems; for instance, while working with a local Laotian student, we discovered that both his parents are Chinese from southeastern Asia. His father came from a Chinese Laotian family and his mother is a Thai-Chinese. The father came to the United States as a student and the mother came as a refugee after the Vietname War. The student was born in the United States. One of his uncles on the father's side went to Argentina and his cousins born in Argentina speak only Spanish. Another uncle's family went to France, and his children, who were born in France, speak only French. Within two decades, the family spread to three continents and none of the second generation speak Laotian. This May, they are gathering in France to celebrate their grandmother's birthday. It is hard to imagine what language they will speak to each other. Therefore, who are the transnationals? I think Chan assumed that the students and professional class are the transnationals. But on a closer study of the refugee groups, many of them are the real transnationals because of the international politics in receiving refugees in the past 30 years.

Another frequently used category for Asian Americans is the dichotomy, "trouble free" and "troubled". According to an extensive review of the literature on at-risk Asian American children, the studies focus mostly on the FOBs and refugee groups. The other two groups are considered the model minorities and are assumed not to have problems in education (Sui 1996). It seems that all class-based attempts to categorize this population in the past either by Chan or Sui created another set of problems.

In 1998, Meyer Weinberg took nation of origin as the significant category to discuss the educational reality facing each group because of the cultural and historical differences among the groups. It is the first book to break away from the "Asian American" hegemonic category. As a result, we understand their reality within each group and their conflicting interests in the collective identity.

Urban development of the United States, Immigration Laws and the New Wave of Asian/Pacific Immigrants

The 1965 Immigration Act that eliminated the national origins quota system was important to Asian immigrants. This wave of Asian immigrants came with the fruit of Asian economic success, immigrating on the basis on professional status, and arrived at the time of the white flight from the city and the establishment of suburbs. Asian Americans followed the white flight to the suburb in the process of U. S. suburban development to avoid de facto segregation of the inner cities and to emerge into the white suburb for their children's education. The move away from the traditional ethnic towns and communities in the metropolitan cities made the Asian Americans in general pay the high price of social and ethnic amnesia which perpetuates the idea that they made it in America. Middle-class Asian Americans live in predominantly white neighborhoods and go to white suburban schools. In joining the white flight process, Asian/Pacific Americans in the suburbs lost their community. Their families became the only source for ethnic identity and support. They also became the consumers of Chinatown for weekend ethnic grocery shopping before the ethnic supermarkets emerged in the suburbs. Most old timers' parents grew up in the era of separate but equal environments then. The civil rights movement in the 1960s and 70s ended school segregation. New wave professionals joined the old timers who

migrated under the category of students for almost 80 years.[2] Many uptown Asian professionals were living outside of Chinatowns. Some of their children went back to the Chinatowns in search for their roots in the 1960s and established new social services agencies there (Kwong 1987,1995) Most of the children grew up after the civil rights movement but before Asian American Studies became one of the major voices in the ethnic studies in 1970s. Thus, they were not educated to know the racial discrimination suffered by Asian/Pacific Americans. They were the product of dominant cultural hegemony in the education system where Asian Americans were invisible in the social sciences, especially in history. They are the ones who easily bought into the model minority myth and acceptance that Frank Chin called "racist love" Not until they reached high schools, where they began to meet other Asians in the process of socialization to the dating culture did they began to ask questions about their identities. The same situation occurred to the new wave immigrants who arrived after 1965. They also bought into the American Dream as depicted in the media. The pursuit of identity and desire to be heard would only be met in the recent higher education institutes where Asian American studies classes are offered.

Geographical location of residence affects the environment of Asian/Pacific American children. In general, they are the honorary whites and do not encounter ethnic cultural social conflicts in the suburban schools until they reach high school. In the Western states, where most of the Asian American population lives, they tend to be treated as a collective and are segregated on national origin lines in the school setting, where Asian Americans only associate with themselves, and some times only with their own national origin group (Lee, 1996).

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[2]After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Congress promoted a policy called "Open Door" which advocated that Western powers keep China open for all to trade and not divide China into small colonies. It also opened its arms to student class as attempt to maintain a good relationship with China and to perserve American interest in China. Most of the student class came to the U.S. Campuses and after 1945 Refuge Act, many Chinese professionals remained in this country.

Regardless of how they are perceived by the mainstream society, Asian Americans usually agree that they encounter racial discrimination in schooling and in job opportunities. For instance, in the spring of 1991 the Wall Street Journal and NBC News conducted a national poll of voters' opinions about a variety of social and economic issues. The poll revealed that the majority of American voters did not believe that Asian Americans suffered from racial discrimination in the United States. Some of those surveyed even believed that Asian American receive "too many special advantages."

The same year, the Asian/Pacific National Conference "Taking America's Pulse: A Summary Report of National Conference Surveys on Inter-Group Relations" commissioned pollster Louis Harris to conduct a nationwide survey of intergroup relations focusing on the attitudes of minorities toward whites. Fifty-four percent of Asian Americans answered affirmatively when asked whether whites were insensitive to other people and have a long history of bigotry. Fifty -seven percent of Asian Americans also felt that their opportunities were not equal to those enjoyed by whites, and most were critical of their opportunities to receive managerial promotions and the same pay for the same work. Most Asian Americans surveyed also felt Asians received biased treatment from the police and a biased portrayal in the media.

School Changing from an Americanization Site to Multicultural Site

The American school, from the nineteenth century on, has been a major institution to Americanize immigrants. The English language became an ideological control mechanism to track language minorities into lower tracks, and consequently, stratify them into lower paying jobs. Most Asian Americans experience the institutionalized Americanization process without realizing their cultural, social and historical backgrounds. Schooling for many minority children servees as a deethnicizing process (Low 1980). Gradual inclusion of Native American and African American literature and history in the mainstream textbooks has paved the

path for Asian American children in search for their own identity. Many of them studied the histories of other minorities in order to build their sense of self and minority position (Grace Lee, 1998). Asian American children still do not learn much about their history in the school setting. Even though Asian American related material is presented, they still face some gaps between Pan-Asian identity and family monoethnic identity.

Gibson found that Punjabi parents in California promoted the adoption of "American" values while at school and the maintenance of traditional values at home (Gibson 1988). Korean Americans reported the same pattern (Stacy Lee 1996). Research conclusions like these are common in the studies of Asian/Pacific American students. They are assumed to have two sets of values. This line of research still carries the historical baggage of the past social scientists' research hypothesis on Asian/Pacific Americans. It perpetuates the social construction of Asians as eternal foreigners. The adoptation of the so called splited cultural spheres among Asian/Pacific American needs further examination.

There are also the gaps in the relevancy of the material and Asian American students' experience. Most bilingual Asian American children have limited opportunities to practice English. Their chances to produce more complex language are further limited if the parents and home environment has limited informational input because of sufficient literacy in English (Goldenberg 1991). School is a socializing site. As the school becomes an essential part in any child's life, the gaps between home culture and self, family value and peer pressure, start to take effect, and sometime the struggle of self becomes obvious. But a simple split-spheres hypothesis is too simplistic.

Oftentimes the information from the media, school, classroom environment, and curriculum is confusing and distorted because it is mainly from the mainstream point of view. Through this publicly accepted lens, Asian Americans reside on the

margin or in a pathological position or even are totally invisible. Most Asian American literature was written by the second generation and their perception of their more nativist social position makes their depiction of their parents (the immigrant generation) take on a mythical and also othering subjectivity. (Chow 1993, Ma1998). If we adopted Bloom's taxonomy, regardless of the effort and teacher's willingness to teach ethnic cultures and histories, it is unavoidable that most of the materials available are inaccurate and distorted in the first stage. If the information gathered is not even accuate in the first place, one can expect the childen to have trouble reaching higher level of understanding about their own cultures and their social position. It will take a tremendous effort on the part of the teachers and the Asian/Pacific American communities to work together for a more diverse and less orientalist children's literature.

Nevertheless, we should not be discouraged by the oppressing facts. It has taken over 500 years to generate a counter discourse on Columbus and one hundred years (1876-1976) to "see" Little Big Horn differently and view Custer and the Seventh Cavalry's last stand as less a massacre and more a battle, less a triumphant march of civilization westward, and more a conflict of cultures. How to challenge the known in history and the general assumptions perpetuated in the mass media is a problem not just to teachers but for the whole society. We also want to empower Asian American students in the process of learning their history. How can we step away from portraying them as victims fighting and resisting oppression which might end up with more conformity than empowerment?

How can we make sure that students from all social classes and ethnic groups learn the skills of analysis and organization, as well as develop the self-confidence needed to engage in struggles for political equality? Cummins (1986) developed strategies to include and empower minority cultures and linguistic groups. He suggests that we study the nature of culture, the nature of cultural conflict and value

conflict to gain powerful analytic concepts that reveal students' real culture and current status. He wants to use students' home, school, and community experience as source material for the curriculum and as a basis for analysis and encouragement of social participation and praxis in the classroom. Roger Daniels said: "Other immigrant group were celebrated for what they had accomplished. Orientals were important for what was done to them." (1986) How to turn a history of victimization to into a history of empowerment? Teaching empowerment to Asian Americans is not an easy task.

With this understanding of the historical and recent demographical development of the group, I will offer some stratigies with the hope that Asian American children can benefit from them.

Strategy 101: Reading Against the Grain.

A Filipino Historical Example

Research accomplished in Asian American Studies can be useful in helping teachers apply new materials with new ways to look at the history of Asian Americans and construct a way of instruction which will be empowering to the Asian American students. I will use the least studied Asian American group, Philipino Americans as an example. 1998 marked the centennial anniversary of the Spanish-American War, and there were four major exhibitions about this war just in New York City, but the genocide of the Philippinos never emerged even as a side story of the celebration; it would spoil the spirit. (for the entanglement of the two nations see Delmendo 1998). From a Philippine American's point of view, the information provided by the mainstream community has left a void in their sense of identity. Eric Wolf's famous phase "people without history" continues in our society. Minority children have paid a great toll to sustain the collective innocence and social amnesia of the mainstream

culture. It is because of this kind of lying by omission from history and avoidance that Asian Americans blamed themselves for experiencing dislocation in American society. It diverts attention away from the historical and structural impact of racism.

The intersections of history offer opportunities for addressing the questions of nationalism, colonialism and war in the Asian minority context. The insurrection of the Philippines was a tenacious myth, created and nurtured by generations of historians. Admiral George Dewey's victory at Manila Bay in 1898 came as a stunning surprise to American political leaders and average citizens alike, none of whom had even heard of the Philippines. As Mr. Dooley put it, no one was sure if they were "islands or canned goods." According to the legend, President McKinley was forced to consult a globe to ascertain the location of these "darned islands." Yet American businesses had been engaged in the Philippine trade long before Dewey arrived there. The legacy continues. The Philippines must come to *our* consciousness first for us to teach the children the historical meaning of this war to this group of "Asian Americans".

As we explore more deeply into the history, we find that contradictions between domestic racism and the imperial ambitions of the United States came into sharp relief as early as 1899 during the Filipino insurrection against occupying US Troops in the aftermath of what North Americans call the Spanish-American war. African American soldiers from the 24th Infantry regiment could not help but notice that white Americans used many of the same epithets to describe Filipinos as they used to describe them, including "niggers," and "black devils". At the end, Filipinos fighting under the command of Emilio Aguinaldo made appeals to Black troops on the basis of "racial" solidarity, offering posts as commissioned officers in the rebel army to those who switched sides. Corporal David Fagen deserted the Infantry on November 17, 1899, to become an officer in the guerrilla army (Lipsitz 1997). This

kind of interracial alliance becomes possible on common ground. But this kind of history is totally forgotten. Filipino Americans usually accepted that their ancestors jumped the ships in New Orleans in 1763 due to the harsh treatment by Spaniards. It justifies the insurrection and colonization of the Philippines and hints that the Americans were the liberator and not the colonizers.

A Chinese American Example

Another example of lost history of past discrimination was the reference to Samuel Gompers' life and his anti-Chinese stand as an instance of the attitudes embodied in the Chinese Exclusion Act. Many Chinese explained to evangelists they rejected the Christian religion because Samuel Gomper was Christian. The union's exclusion of Chinese had its social consequence that Chinese Americans are still fighting to enter trade union (Kwong 1995, 1997). Chinese managed to resist the social violence to keep them in the Chinatown ghetto by fighting their way with their business rights to open laundry and restaurant business in the white neighborhood (McClaim 1994, Slayer 1995).

In general, Chinese Americans had avery different experience in the historical period marked by the mainstream history. For instance, in Chinese American history, there was no Progressive Era. The Era meant hard time for theie communities. They were subjected to severe racial violence of the local level and forbidden immigration at the Federal level (Chinese Exclusion Act 1882). Chinese immigrant women faced exclusion even earlier by the Page Act of 1875 (Peffer 1986,1999) Discussing the industrialization of the nation during this period without addressing the exclusion of minorities in the process is omitting a lot of historical facts.

Interethnic Relation in the Asian American Communities

After Pearl Harbor in 1941, all ethnic language schools in Hawaii were closed under the martial law. Chinese American in Hawaii started immediately after the War to campaign for the reopening of Chinese language schools through legal means to

fight the Foreign Language School Law of the Territory of Hawaii. The United Chinese Labor Association started to organize the campaign and officially filed a lawsuit against Hawaiian government in February, 1946. On Oct. 22, 1947, a special court decided that the Hawaiian law was unconstitutional and allowed reopening of Chinese language schools. During this time, the Japanese American communities gave their full support to the action of the Chinese community. As a result of the reopening of the Chinese language schools, two Japanese schools reopened in January, 1948 (Tong 1997, in Chinese). This historical event showed that Chinese Americans and Japanese American united to fight for a commonly shared interest: the right to educate their children with the home language in an American context.

All these examples are against our general assumption of the community and this is one of the best ways to show that Asian Americans share common experience with other minorities and even with other Asian American groups in the American context. We have read against the grain in order to find the alternatives Asian Americans found in the racially violent environment in the United States.

Strategy 102: Appeal to Common Sense: Whose Migration?

Levstik and Barton (1997) Doing History : Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools is an inspirational book in teaching history. Yet in chapter 5:" linking Children to the past through family histories" lists books in four categories : family history; migration to the United States and forced migration; and refugees and the underground railroad. Obviously, the family history list will address the mainstream white children's experience, the migration part will address those who recently came to the country, forced migration will address slavery and the refugee list will address the most recent wave of refugees started after the end of Vietnam War. Most books in migration category focus mostly on the Asian immigrant experience such as The Eternal Spring of Mr. Ito, A Vietnamese-American Boy, Angel Child, Dragon Child, Lion Dance : Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year; books on the third

category, forced migration, listed China's Long March: 6000 Miles of Anger, and Escape from Slavery. Here, migration implies minorities moving from other places to America. A critical reading of the selection and their underlying message requires close reflection and reexamination. Chinese Americans have been here as early as the 1840s. Migration is a wonderful theme where everyone in the class can take part in sharing their family history, but to strike a balance and not aim at minorities demands extra effort from the teachers.

Pan-Asian identity also contributes to the confusion; for instance, Allen Say's Grandfather's Journey is a fine book for Asian Children. Most teacher would use this book as a reading text for a class to introduce the migration journey of "Asian Americans". The problem is that the reader's ethnicity-specific reality (Korean American, Chinese American) often conflicts with Say's ethnicity specific (Japanese American) context. For instance, at the time of the internment camps, Japan had just invaded China and Chinese Americans applauded the decision.[3] Therefore, on what ground will Asian Americans' experience become commonly shared in particular historical intersections needs to be further addressed.

Once we enter the world of Say and the culture his story represents, we will have to find a historical context for the Grandfather's departure from the United States. Simply home sick? Racial discrimination? Immigration status? What will the children get from reading this text? What will this story of the grandfather's journey tell Asian American about their identity? Will a similar repatriation story of Italian

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[3]Due to violence against the Japanese communities during this time, Chinese Americans would dress to mark themselves as Chinese not Japanese. But after the war, in the native language school issue, especially in Hawaii where Marshall Law ruled after Peal Harbor incidence prohibited native language schools, Chinese communities took it to the court and won the rights for both Japanese and Chinese and even all ethnic minority groups rights to operate native language schools. Intergroup relationship changed through time and text too.

descent expand the experience and make Asian Americans feel that the migration and repatriation not only happened in the Asian Communities but also to many other ethnic groups?[4] Are the teachers prepared to address Japanese American citizens living in Japan during World War II in comparison to the internment of them in the United States?

Strategy 103: Construction of Cultural Meaning in Language

For the purpose of understanding the context of reading material, G. H. Mead's core ideas have to do with the distinction between the social symbol and individual meaning. Social symbol is shared. "It is in part on the basis of socially shared symbols that the action faces a situation and formulates action. Individual meaning, however, is uniquely established through the contextualization of social symbols during the formulation of action in relation to private thought and the perceived gestures of others for all his emphasis of the act" (Mead, 1950). Reading involves social, cultural text. Since there are only a few books related to Asian American, most of the time, the reading material the cultural meaning of the meterial remains implicit. I will use The Giving Tree to illustrate my point. I encountered a lot of problem when I read this story with my Asian American students.

The induced giving potential of my student scared me. This is one of the examples of our dialogue. I often wonder why this book is so widely read.

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[4]The tendency in the past has been for immigration historians to view Chinese as "sojourners" and Europeans as "immigrants," the implication being that the Chinese, unlike Europeans, did not intend to stay but remained unassimilated and apart from mainstream American society; hence it was justifiable to bar their further immigration and exclude them from American social and political life. Recent scholarship, using return migration rates and written sentiment of immigrants, has demonstrated that many Europeans --such as Greeks, Italians, Poles, Danes, Germans, and Slovaks-- shared this sojourner attitude. See Frank Ng, "The Sojourner, Return Migration, and Immigration History," (pp. 53-71) and Suchen Chen, "European and Asian Immigrants" (pp. 38-39) in Chinese America: History and Perspectives, 1987.

(C stands for Carol and S stands for Student--A Chinese American second grader. The class was conducted in July, 1998.)

C: "What kind of tree is this?"

S: "A giving one."

C: "Very good. Is it a cherry tree or a peach tree?"

S: "A apple tree."

C: "*An* apple tree."

S: "Yes, an apple tree."

C: "What does the tree give?"

S: "It give everything, He gives itself."

C: "He gives himself. Can you give yourself?"

S: "Yah."

C: "How can you give yourself?"

S: "I can give myself to you!"

C: "Really, very sweet of you, is that a promise?"

S: "Yah."

C: "I will tell you what to do and you will do it for me?"

S: "Yah!"

C: "This is a very good promise, I like it."

C: "What does the tree give to the boy?"

S: "He give apple and he gives trunk."

C: "How can she live when she gives him her trunk?"

S: "He can't."

C: "What does the boy need the trunk for?"

S: "He needs a boat." "To sail."

C: "He wants to sail away and the tree says 'yes'."

S: "The apple tree gives him his trunk."

C: "If you were the tree, what will you do?"

S: "NO! I will not give up my trunk."

C: "Remember your promise?"

S: "I won't give my trunk."

C: "Will you give me your apple?"

S: "Yah, apple is fine. The trunk, no."

C: "Why?"

S: "I will die."

C: "This is good. You know that the boy asks too much and the tree should not be so giving?"

S: "Yeah! I will not give my trunk."

C:" What kind of tree would you like to be?"

S: "I don't know."

C: "I like to be a musical tree. I like my leaves are like musical notes. A singing tree. Or like the whispering pine tree."

S: "I want to be a dancing tree."

C: "What? A dancing tree?"

S: "Like the Willow dancing in the wind."

C: "Like the weeping Cherry, it can also dance in the wind."

S: "Yes, I like cherry tree."

C: "How about Bamboo tree, can it dance in the wind?"

S: "Sure."

C: "How does it dance?"

The student demonstrates by bending his body and swaying.

C: "Very nice."

My strategy was to shift his identification with the boy by asking him questions from the tree's point of view. During the process of question and answer, S begins to speak from the position of the abused tree and learns to set his limits.

Through his identification with and speaking for the tree or the boy, the language acquires individual meaning in Mead's sense. As a bilingual person, I understand that he has the ability to distinguish the pronouns in the context. His creative way of using the pronouns shows that his home language does influence his language use. Generally, the Chinese langauge only has one third person singular pronoun. His usage of the particular pronoun has symbolic meaning. He calls the tree "he" when he begins to identify with "it". And my insistence on calling the tree "she" is also very interesting in the way I identify to fend off my own identity as an ever-giving mother. How our languages interact with each other is another interesting aspect. The teacher and student negotiate a terrain of personal relationship of defining "good giving" and "bad giving". As a teacher, I am hesitating to execute my manipulating power and his unconditional and situational submission of himself and manipulation of me at the same time. My respect for his language use comes with the insight of our social context and reception of his languages. From our dialogue the shared social symbol--the apple tree and the English pronouns we use to represent the tree in the context of the reading and dialogue- is expanded as a way to bring forth other social symbols. Some might have culturally specific links, but I did not want to make them explicit. My intention is to expand the social symbol that I consider embedded in Western values and to accept the confusing usage of pronouns in the context to help me to figure out further strategies in my future lessons on English language. Through the expansion of social symbols, I hope to enhance the child's imagination and self-concept. Students must have strong self-concepts to be able to share their ideas and emotions publicly. In this case, the cultural space lies in the language itself. Finding the right way and moment to enforce standard English in reading and speaking and enjoying the ambiguity of languages is a part of the cultural space under negotiation.

Conclusion

Negotiation to construct an Asian American cultural space exists in

reading against the commonly shared assumptions about the communities by putting the community experience at the center to counter the various historical baggages that make them invisible. Applying the research finding of Asian American Studied to the elementary level reading involves 1) integration of a great deal of new knowledge in understanding the current status of Asian American communities (and its implication and impact on individual students and creative experiments in the classroom); 2) bridging the gaps of existing literature available; 3) countering the long history of western/mainstream view on this particular group of immigrants from the different shore; 4) applying counter hegemonic knowledge produced in Asian American Studies to the lower grade levels for Asian/Pacific American students in elementary schools so that they might understand their history and the social and global context that brought them to migrate to the United States. This requires teaching professionals' own reflection on their old practices and to overcome the void of materials. How to turn the intersection of cultures, class, race, and gender into empowering instead of silencing points in teaching will always be a challenge. Asian American cultural space in the mainstream historical text depends on finding new ways to rethink history and tell new stories. The English language is a site which offers cultural space for children to understand their intercultural practice, home language and social position. Cultural sensitivity to instruction at this level depends on the struggle to hear the children's needs and willingness to challenge one's own perception and practice.

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